



LEA Plan for Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Service Pursuant to the Federal American Rescue Plan Act, Section 2001(i)

Introduction and Background

As announced in the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE)'s [April 28, 2021 broadcast](#), in March 2021 President Biden signed the Federal [American Rescue Plan \(ARP\) Act](#), Public Law 117-2, into law. The ARP Act provides an additional \$122 billion in Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ARP ESSER) to States and school districts to help safely reopen, sustain the safe operation of schools, and address the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the nation's students. As with the previous ESSER funds available under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act, and the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSA), the purpose of the additional funding is to support local educational agencies (LEAs) in preparing for and responding to the impacts of COVID-19 on educators, students, and families. Additional information on ARP ESSER may be found in the NJDOE's [funding comparison fact sheet](#).

Section 2001(i)(1) of the ARP Act requires each LEA that receives ARP ESSER funds to develop and make publicly available on the LEA's website, no later than 30 days after receiving ARP ESSER funds, a plan for the safe return to in-person instruction and continuity of services for all schools (Safe Return Plan). A Safe Return Plan is required of all fund recipients, including those that have already returned to in-person instruction. Section 2001(i)(2) of the ARP Act further requires that the LEA seek public comment on the Safe Return Plan and take those comments into account in finalization of the Safe Return Plan. Under the interim final requirements published in [Volume 86, No. 76 of the Federal Register](#) by the U.S. Department of Education (USDE), an LEA must periodically, but no less frequently than every six months through September 30, 2023, review and, as appropriate, revise its Safe Return Plan.

Pursuant to those requirements, **LEAs must submit to the NJDOE and post on their website their Safe Return Plans by June 24, 2021.** The NJDOE intends to make LEA ARP ESSER Fund applications available in EWEG on May 24, 2021 and LEAs will submit their Safe Return Plans to the NJDOE via EWEG. To assist LEAs with the development of their Safe Return Plans, the NJDOE is providing the following template.

This template incorporates the federally-required components of the Safe Return Plan. The questions in the template below will be included in the LEA ARP ESSER Fund application in EWEG. LEAs will submit responses to the questions within the LEA ARP ESSER Fund application in EWEG by June 24, 2021. The NJDOE hopes that this template will allow LEAs to effectively plan for that submission and to easily post the information to their websites as required by the ARP Act.

Note that on May 17, 2021, Governor Murphy [announced](#) that upon the conclusion of the 2020-2021 school year, portions of Executive Order 175 allowing remote learning will be rescinded, meaning that schools will be required to provide full-day, in-person instruction, as they were prior to the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency. The NJDOE and New Jersey Department of Health will share additional information regarding State requirements or guidance for health and safety protocols for the 2021-2022 school year as it becomes available.

In June 2021, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) and New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH) published [The Road Forward: Health and Safety Guidance for the 2021-2022 School Year](#). This plan was revised based upon the recommendations in that guidance. If the NJDOE and NJDOH change their recommendations, we will revisit the plan at that time.

Hackensack Public Schools Plan for Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services

LEA Name: Hackensack Board of Education

Date: 06/14/2021

Date Revised: 08/23/2021

1. Maintaining Health and Safety

For each mitigation strategy listed below (A–H), please describe how the LEA will maintain the health and safety of students, educators, and other staff and the extent to which it has adopted policies, and a description of any such policies, on each of the following safety recommendations established by the CDC.

A. Universal and correct wearing of masks

Hackensack Public Schools continues to follow the recommendations of the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) and New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH). At this time, we require all students and all staff to wear masks that adequately cover both the nose and mouth at all times in a school building with the following exceptions:

- When doing so would inhibit the individual's health, such as when the individual is exposed to extreme heat indoors;
- When the individual has trouble breathing, is unconscious, incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove a face covering without assistance;
- When a student's documented medical condition or disability, as reflected in an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or Educational Plan pursuant to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, precludes use of a face covering;
- When the individual is under two (2) years of age;

- When the individual is engaged in activity that cannot physically be performed while wearing a mask, such as eating or drinking, or playing a musical instrument that would be obstructed by a face covering;
- When the individual is engaged in high-intensity aerobic or anaerobic activity;
- When a student is participating in high-intensity physical activities during a physical education class in a well-ventilated location and able to maintain a physical distance of six feet from all other individuals; or
- When wearing a face covering creates an unsafe condition in which to operate equipment or execute a task.

Transportation

School buses should be considered school property for the purpose of determining the need for prevention strategies. Masks must be worn by all passengers on buses, regardless of vaccination status.

B. Physical distancing (e.g., including use of cohorts/podding)

All classrooms, cafeterias, testing and therapy rooms at Hackensack Public schools will have students seated according to NJDOH regulations between three and six feet apart wherever practicable. When schools cannot maintain three to six feet of social distancing, schools, as deemed appropriate by Building Principals, will implement strategies to maximize opportunities to increase distance between students such as:

- Face desks in the same direction
- Avoid grouped seating arrangements
- Have students sit only on one side of the table
- Use physical barriers or desk shields

Schools will strive to create as much physical distancing as possible in classrooms, cafeterias, hallways, and other spaces. This will be reinforced by providing physical guides, such as tape on floors or sidewalks and signs on walls, to help ensure that staff and students follow social distancing protocols.

Schools will strive to maintain cohorts or groups of students with dedicated staff who remain together throughout the day, including at recess, lunchtimes, and while participating in extracurricular activities wherever possible.

Meals

For meals offered in cafeterias or other group dining areas, where masks may not be worn, schools may implement other layered prevention strategies to help mitigate the spread of COVID-19. These strategies include:

- Maintaining physical distancing between students and staff, if possible.

- Considering alternatives to use of group dining areas such as eating in classrooms or outdoors.
- Staggering eating times to allow for greater physical distancing.
- Maintaining student cohorts and limiting mixing between groups, if possible.
- Avoiding offering self-serve food options.
- Discouraging students from sharing meals.
- Encouraging routine cleaning between groups.
- Frequently touched surfaces should be cleaned. Surfaces that come in contact with food should be washed, rinsed, and sanitized before and after meals. Given the data regarding COVID-19 transmission, the use of single-use items, such as disposable utensils, is not necessary during meals.

C. Handwashing and respiratory etiquette

Staff and students will continue to receive training and reinforcement on proper hand washing techniques with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not readily available, hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol can be used. Hand sanitizing stations have been placed strategically in all classrooms, high population areas such as, offices, entrances/exits, restrooms, and cafeteria. Students and staff wash their hands and/or sanitize their hands frequently: upon entering the building, after they utilize the restroom, blow their nose, cough or sneeze, before and after eating, prior to dismissal, and every time they enter a different classroom/workspace. Signage on proper handwashing technique is posted in all bathrooms and above all hand washing stations.

D. Cleaning and maintaining healthy facilities, including improving ventilation

The District will maintain adequate supplies (i.e. classroom supplies, equipment) to minimize sharing of high-touch materials or limit use of supplies and equipment by one group of students at a time and clean and disinfect routinely and preferably between use. The District will encourage hand hygiene practices between use of shared items and discourage use of shared items that cannot be cleaned and disinfected. All classrooms, and other areas occupied by students or staff, shall be routinely cleaned and disinfected with an EPA-registered product for use against SARS-CoV-2. Frequently touched areas such as doorknobs, lockers, water fountains, sinks, light switches, railings, elevators, lab equipment, etc. shall be cleaned multiple times per day if possible, but at least daily. All cleanings shall be performed by properly trained custodial/maintenance staff, and documentation of the cleanings performed shall be maintained by the district and made readily available for review by the staff, the local education association, and parents should they inquire. A procedure manual was developed and includes custodial cleaning and sanitizing daily schedule as well as schedules for increased cleaning and disinfection along with targeted areas to be cleaned and can be viewed on the Hackensack Public Schools Website or by clicking here: [HPS COVID-19 Custodian Cleaning & Sanitizing Procedure Manual](#)

The District will improve airflow to the extent possible to increase circulation of outdoor air, increase the delivery of clean air, and dilute potential contaminants. This will be achieved through several strategies:

- Bring in as much outdoor air as possible by opening windows and doors to increase outdoor airflow which helps reduce the potential concentration of virus particles in the air. The District will not open windows or doors if doing so poses a safety or health risk (such as falling, exposure to extreme temperatures, or triggering asthma symptoms), or if doing so would otherwise pose a security risk.
- Use exhaust fans in restrooms and kitchens where possible.
- Consider having activities, classes, or lunches outdoors when circumstances allow.

In regards to HVAC, the district has contracts with two companies that oversee the proper controls of the air environment. One focuses on the HVAC system and the other monitors temperature controls. Both companies annually inspect all systems and then are available on an as needed basis. Ventilation equipment will be checked and replaced, as required, monthly, or more frequently, as necessary based on regular inspections. Further, the District is actively looking to install new classroom unit ventilators, and improved HVAC systems for all instructional spaces over time with the current Energy Savings Improvement Program (ESIP) project and new ESSER funds. These improvements should begin during the upcoming school year and be completed within the next three years.

E. Contact tracing in combination with isolation and quarantine, in collaboration with the State, local, territorial, or Tribal health departments

Communication

Hackensack Public Schools and the Local Health Department (LHD) will maintain close communication with each other to provide information and share resources on COVID-19 transmission, prevention, and control measures and to establish procedures for LHD notification and response to COVID-19 illness in school settings.

Contact Tracing

All school nurses completed a contact tracing certification course to be able to work in support of the LHD with communication and contact information. All procedures adhere to applicable federal and state law and regulations regarding privacy and the confidentiality of records. The Director of Special Services is the designated staff liaison responsible for providing notifications and carrying out other components of the board’s contact tracing policy. The School Nurse in consultation with the Building Principal shall establish measures for a system of open communication that allows staff, students, and families to self-report symptoms and/or suspected exposure. If a staff member shall observe symptoms consistent with COVID-19 or becomes aware that an individual who has spent time in a district facility tests positive for COVID-19, communication will be from the staff member to the school nurse who will then notify the Principal and Director of Special Services who will then notify the Central Office and the LHD. The district will assist the LHD with contract tracing by identifying who the individuals were in close contact with.

- Per the CDC, close contact is defined as being within 6 feet of someone with suspected or known COVID-19 for 15 or more minutes during a 24-hour period. In certain situations, it may be difficult to determine whether individuals have met this criterion and an entire cohort, classroom, or other group may need to be considered exposed.

- **Exception:** In the K–12 indoor classroom setting, the close contact definition excludes students who were within 3 to 6 feet of an infected student (laboratory-confirmed or a [clinically compatible illness](#)) where both the infected student and the exposed student(s) correctly and consistently wore well-fitting masks the entire time. This exception does not apply to teachers, staff, or other adults in the indoor classroom setting. (updated 8/21)

Response to Symptomatic Students and Staff

Should a student or staff member exhibit symptoms consistent with COVID-19 while on school property, the school nurse should be contacted immediately. The school nurse will:

- Move the student or staff member to the designated isolation room, which is an area separate from the nurse’s office, and ensure there is enough space for multiple people placed at least 6 feet apart. The nurse’s office should be used for routine visits such as medication administration, injuries, and non-COVID-19 related visits.
- Ask ill student (or parent/guardian) and staff whether they have had potential exposure to COVID-19 in the past 14 days meeting the definition of a close contact.
- Send home and refer individuals to a healthcare provider. Persons with COVID-19 compatible symptoms should undergo COVID-19 testing.
 - If community transmission is low, ill individuals without potential exposure to COVID-19 should follow the [NJDOH School Exclusion List](#). No public health notification is needed UNLESS there is an unusual increase in the number of persons who are ill (over normal levels), which might indicate an outbreak.
 - If ill students have potential COVID-19 exposure OR if community transmission is moderate or high, they should be excluded according to the COVID-19 Exclusion Criteria.
- Schools with testing capacity will encourage testing of ill students and staff, consistent with any federal and state requirements, including requirements regarding parental consent.
 - Ill individuals who test positive should be reported to the LHD and contact tracing should begin.
 - Ill individuals that test negative should be referred to a healthcare provider, who may consider additional COVID-19 testing.
- Hackensack Public Schools will notify the LHD when students or staff:
 - Are ill and have potential COVID-19 exposure;
 - When they see an increase in the number of persons with COVID-19 compatible symptoms.
 - Test positive for COVID-19.
- Hackensack Public Schools will provide the following information when consulting with the LHD:
 - Contact information for the ill persons;
 - The date the ill person developed symptoms, tested positive for COVID-19 (if known), and was last in the building;

- Types of interactions (close contacts, length of contact) the person may have had with other persons in the building or in other locations;
- Names, addresses, and telephone numbers for ill person's close contacts in the school;
- Vaccination status if known
- Any other information to assist with the determination of next steps.

Regardless of vaccination status, if a student or staff experiences COVID-19 compatible symptoms, they should isolate themselves from others, be clinically evaluated for COVID-19, and tested for SARS-CoV-2.

COVID-19 Exclusion Criteria for Persons Who Have COVID-19 Compatible Symptoms or Who Test Positive for COVID-19:

- Ill individuals with COVID-19 compatible symptoms who have not been tested or individuals who tested positive for COVID-19 should stay home until at least 10 days have passed since symptom onset and at least 24 hours have passed after resolution of fever without fever reducing medications and improvement in symptoms.
- Persons who test positive for COVID-19 but who are asymptomatic should stay home for 10 days from the positive test result.
- An alternate diagnosis (including a positive strep test or influenza swab) without a negative COVID-19 test is not acceptable for individuals who meet COVID-19 exclusion criteria to return to school earlier than the timeframes above.

Exception: During periods of low community transmission, ill individuals excluded for COVID-19 compatible symptoms who are not tested and do not have a known COVID-19 exposure may follow [NJDOH School Exclusion List](#) to determine when they may return to school. (updated August 2021)

School staff should identify school-based close contacts of positive COVID-19 cases in the school.

- As with any other communicable disease outbreak, schools will assist in identifying the close contacts within the school and communicating this information back to the LHD.
- With guidance from the LHD, schools will be responsible for notifying parents and staff of the close contact exposure and exclusion requirements while maintaining confidentiality.

The LHD contact tracing team will notify and interview the close contacts identified by the school and reinforce the exclusion requirements.

The COVID-19 Exclusion Table described in [NJDOH guidance for Local health departments](#) can be used to determine the need for and duration of school exclusion based on the level of COVID-19 community transmission in their region. In order to facilitate rapid diagnosis and limit unnecessary school exclusion, Hackensack Public Schools will offer diagnostic testing for students and staff.

COVID-19 Exclusion Criteria for Close Contacts

CDC released guidance with options to shorten the [quarantine](#) time period following exposure to a confirmed positive case. While CDC and NJDOH continue to endorse 14 days as the preferred quarantine period– and thus the preferred school exclusion period – regardless of the community transmission level, it is recognized that any quarantine shorter than 14 days balances reduced burden against a small possibility of spreading the virus. Additional information is described in [NJDOH Quarantine Guidance](#). To that end, excluded individuals who are close contacts of staff or students who tested positive for COVID-19 may be considered for a reduced exclusion period based on [community transmission levels](#) as follows:

- High (orange) exposed close contacts should be excluded from school for 14 days.
- Moderate or Low (yellow or green) exposed close contacts should be excluded from school for 10 days (or 7 days with negative test results collected at 5-7 days)

Schools serving medically complex or other high-risk individuals should use a 14-day exclusion period for the exclusion of these individuals or those who work closely with them when identified as close contacts in all levels of [community transmission](#).

Exposed close contacts who are fully vaccinated and have no COVID-like symptoms:

- Do not need to quarantine, be excluded from school, or be tested following an exposure to someone with suspected or confirmed COVID-19.
- Should still monitor for symptoms of COVID-19 for 14 days following an exposure.
- If they experience symptoms, they should isolate themselves from others, be clinically evaluated for COVID-19, including SARS-CoV-2 testing and inform their health care provider of their vaccination status at the time of presentation to care.

F. Diagnostic and screening testing

Parents/caregivers will be asked to complete a COVID-19 screener attestation at the beginning of the school year or commencement of their child’s schooling to ensure that their child will not enter a school building if they are exposed to anyone with signs or symptoms of COVID-19 or exhibiting any COVID-19 related symptoms. Parents/caregivers will be strongly encouraged to monitor their children for signs of illness on a daily basis as they are the front line for assessing illness in their children. Students who are sick should not attend school. All schools will strictly enforce exclusion criteria for both students and staff. Schools will continually educate parents about the importance of monitoring symptoms and keeping children home while ill. Schools will use existing outreach systems to provide reminders to staff and families to check for symptoms before leaving for school. Schools will provide clear and accessible directions to parents/caregivers and students for reporting symptoms and reasons for absences.

Staff will be asked to complete a COVID-19 screener attestation at the beginning of the school year or commencement of their employment to ensure that they will not enter a school building if they are exposed to anyone with signs or symptoms of COVID-19 or exhibiting any COVID-19 related symptoms.

COVID-19 Testing will be available on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from 11 am to 4 pm at no cost to students or staff at the following locations as indicated below:

- Mondays – Hackensack High School
- Wednesdays – Hackensack Middle School
- Fridays – Jackson Avenue School

G. Efforts to provide vaccinations to educators, other staff, and students, if eligible

Hackensack Public Schools will continue to share where vaccines are administered and seek out opportunities for students and staff to be vaccinated should the need warrant it.

H. Appropriate accommodations for children with disabilities with respect to the health and safety policies

Accommodations for children with disabilities are and will continue to be made according to their Individualized Educational Plans.

2. Ensuring Continuity of Services

A. Describe how the LEA will ensure continuity of services, including but not limited to services to address students’ academic needs and students’ and staff’s social, emotional, mental health, and other needs, which may include student health and food services. (1000-character limit)

Hackensack Public Schools plans to reopen schools in September with a regular full day, full time, in-person instruction schedule with no remote option. For all of our schools, we will have after school tutoring for targeted students from October through May three days a week to target learning loss. Food services including free breakfast will continue throughout the 2021-22 school year. The district will be hiring intervention teachers for the elementary schools to focus on learning loss, specifically in grades 2 and 3. Additionally, training for educators to support student and staff mental health, as well as various student social emotional after school opportunities and intramural sports will be offered in the 2021-2022 school year.

Remote Instruction/180-Day Requirement

Pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:7F-9, schools must be in session for 180 days to receive state aid. The statute requires that school facilities be provided for at least 180 days during the school year. Section (b) notes that where a district is required to close the schools of the district for more than three consecutive school days due to a declared state of emergency, declared public health emergency, or a directive and/or recommendation by the appropriate health agency or officer to institute a public health-related closure, days of virtual or remote instruction commensurate with in-person instruction will count towards the district's 180-day requirement.

Hackensack Public Schools may be confronted with the incidence of COVID-19 positive cases amongst staff and/or students. If Hackensack Public Schools is required to exclude a student, group of students, a class, or multiple classes as a result of the scenarios listed above, while the school itself remains open for in-person instruction, Hackensack Public Schools will be prepared to offer virtual or remote instruction to those students in a manner commensurate with in-person instruction to the extent possible. In circumstances when the school facilities remain open and in-person instruction continues in those classrooms that are not required to quarantine, those days in session will also count towards the district's 180-day requirement in accordance with N.J.S.A. 18A:7F-9.

3. Public Comment

A. Describe how the LEA sought public comment on its plan, and how it took those public comment into account in the development of its plan.

Note, the ARP requires that LEAs seek public comment for each 60-day revision to the plan. (1000-character limit)

Prior to reopening in January 2021, Hackensack Public Schools had the plan reviewed by the District Reopening Committee which was comprised of all stakeholders including but not limited to students, parents, administrators, and Board of Education members. Meetings for each school took place via Zoom, and the district held a separate forum at that time for the public. The Superintendent reviewed the plan at the June 21 Board of Education meeting for public comment. The District Reopening Committee met on August 4, 2021 to review the plan for the 2021/2022 school-year.

Subsequently, a [Google Form](#) that included a link to the plan was shared with all stakeholders to obtain public comment on any and all sections of the plan. Based on comments and feedback, the plan may need to be adjusted. The Superintendent will present the plan at the August 23 Board of Education Meeting for further public comment.

B. Describe how the LEA ensured that the plan is in an understandable and uniform format; is to the extent practicable written in a language that parents can understand or, if not practicable to provide written translations to a parent with limited English proficiency, will be orally translated for such a parent; and upon request by a parent who is an individual with a disability as defined by the ADA, will be provided in an alternative format accessible to that parent. (1000-character limit)

Hackensack Public Schools has followed the suggested template provided by the New Jersey Department of Education for this plan. The District Reopening plan is accessible in Spanish and English on our website. Parents with disabilities will be provided with an alternative format accessible to that parent upon request.

Furthermore, Principals will invite parents and families to Reopening Meetings prior to the first day of school to explain the Reopening Plan and provide opportunities for parents and families to ask questions. Meetings will be offered in English and Spanish. Other languages can be offered upon request.